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TAGS: [DR](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#)
SUBJECT: DOMINICAN POLITICS III #5: PRIMER ON THE PRD PARTY

REF: A. SANTO DOMINGO 2769
[1](#)B. SANTO DOMINGO 3000

Classified By: ECOPOL Counselor Michael A. Meigs, Reason 1.4(d).

[1](#)1. This is the fifth cable in our series on Dominican politics in the third year of the administration of President Leonel Fernandez.

PRIMER ON THE PRD PARTY

(C) Despite major defeats in the 2004 presidential and 2006 legislative elections, the Dominican Revolutionary Party (PRD) remains the largest opposition party in the Dominican Republic and has an important role to play in the strengthening of democracy in the country. We therefore offer this primer on the PRD party, as well as biographic notes on the major figures. Keys to watch for are whether former President Mejia will remain influential and continue to drag the party down, and how the PRD,s attempts to renew the organization -- through a convention and development of a party platform -- develop over the next year-and-a-half. For the PRD at least, the May 2008 presidential election has already begun.

Background

(U) The populist PRD has held the presidency on four occasions since 1963, despite the machinations of long-serving President Joaquin Balaguer and his PRSC, and the currently ruling PLD was established by Juan Bosch in the 1970's as a PRD breakaway. The PRD held majorities in both the Senate and House from 1998-2006.

A Divided House

(C) The PRD has been badly divided since 2003, when then-President Hipolito Mejia launched a re-election bid that

party rivals were sure would fail, given the banking crisis and resulting economic collapse that gripped the country that year. Mejia's rivals mockingly called his party faction the &Party for Hipolito8 (PPH). At the height of the party's internal divisions, then-party president Hatuey Decamps organized a breakaway PRD convention, was expelled from the party, and went on to form the Dominican Revolutionary Social Democratic Party. Mejia secured the PRD nomination for the 2004 election and was roundly defeated by the PLD's Leonel Fernandez.

(C) In the May 2006 legislative elections, new leadership led the PRD into a "Grand Alliance" with the PRSC. Mejia was still influential. With the PRSC adding another element to the already fractured PRD, the coalition was ineffective and at times chaotic. Disputes over candidate selection were fierce, resulting in a number of districts where both parties competed or where officials not selected by the PRD instead stood for other parties or as independents. The results were devastating: the PRD presence in the 32-seat Senate fell from 91 percent to 19 percent; in the enlarged House, the party dropped from 48 percent to 34 percent. The Grand Alliance probably served to avoid humiliation in other races, where the PRSC would have out-pollled the PRD. Every seat lost by the PRD was picked up by the PLD, which now holds majorities of 69 percent in the Senate and 54 percent in the House.

The Same Mistakes in 2008?

(SBU) Appalled at the defeats suffered by their once proud party, and convinced that the role of the unpopular Mejia was to blame, the former President's rivals formed a party faction called the Corriente Unitaria (&Unified Force8(?)).

One of the CU's first tasks has been to oppose Mejia's choice to represent the PRD as its presidential candidate for 2008, Miguel Vargas Maldonado (see bio notes below). The Corriente Unitaria argues that Vargas, who served as Minister of Public Works 2000-2004, is too close to Mejia to have a chance of winning the race. Mejia's faction, which includes (to varying degrees) PRD President Ramon Albuquerque and Secretary-General Orlando Jorge Mera, counters that the

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Corriente Unitaria is undermining party discipline. Albuquerque recently told the press that he would rather have 100 party members that fight, love, and respect the PRD than 10,000 who are interested only in discrediting the organization -- an implicit criticism of the Corriente Unitaria's tactics.

(SBU) In recent weeks, Vargas seemed poised to establish an insurmountable lead in the nomination race before his opponents could get organized. Although discreet at the national level, he has begun active campaigning in the eprovinces. However, the Corriente Unitaria fought hard, and successfully, to postpone the party convention for two months (from the November 12 date pushed through originally by Vargas supporters to January 7, instead). On September 20, the faction unanimously chose former Vice President Milagros Ortiz Bosch as its candidate to challenge Vargas for the presidential nomination.

(C) Biographic Notes

MIGUEL VARGAS MALDONADO: Vargas, emergence as the early favorite in nomination race for PRD presidential candidate for 2008 has surprised some because of his previously low profile. He was Minister of Public Works for the Mejia administration and headed the organizing committee for the Santo Domingo Pan-American Games in 2003. Vargas remains close to former President Mejia. He inherited a large fortune and added to it as an entrepreneur in construction.

RAMON ALBUQUERQUE: President of the PRD and former Senator. While Albuquerque has a small following of his own within the party, he is close to Mejia. He recently implied to EMBOFFs that he owes his position in the PRD to the former

President,s support during the party elections of 2005.

ORLANDO JORGE MERA: Secretary-General of the PRD. Jorge, who is in his mid-30s, speaks of a new, younger generation in the PRD oriented toward uniting and modernizing their party; however, it is likely that he is indebted to Mejia for helping him obtain his party position. The son of former President Salvador Jorge Blanco, Jorge Mera operates a joint law practice with his wife. (See also Ref A.)

MILAGROS ORTIZ BOSCH: Corriente Unitaria faction,s candidate for PRD presidential nomination. Vice President of the Republic and Secretary of Education in the Mejia Administration, 2000-2004, and Senator 1990-2000. Ortiz Bosch is the niece of Juan Bosch, founder of the PRD, but did not join her uncle when he left the party in 1972 to create the now-ruling PLD party.

FELLO SUBERVI BONILLA: Former Secretary-General of the PRD. Subervi could have run for the presidential nomination in 2008, and would likely have received some support, but he deferred to Ortiz in any effort to maintain the unity of the Corriente Unitaria faction.

VIRGILIO BELLO ROSA: Member of Corriente Unitaria. A former Attorney General, Bello flirted with but ultimately abandoned a presidential run earlier this year.

RAFAEL ABINADER: Member of Corriente Unitaria. A former Senator, Abinader has served in a number of finance-related government positions. Joined the PRD as a founding member in 1961 and later served as Minister of Finance in the short-lived &Constitutional Government8 headed by Colonel Caamano in 1965.

EMMANUEL ESQUEA GUERRERO: Member of Corriente Unitaria. Former party President, Congressman, and Permanent Representative to the United Nations.

Comment

(C) The fact that former President Mejia continues to be the de facto leader of the party says a great deal about Dominican politics. Placing blind faith in his cabinet and at times ignoring reports of incompetence or malfeasance, Mejia presided over an economic collapse, resulting in two consecutive decisive electoral defeats for the party. By terms of the amendment that allowed him to run in 2004, he is now constitutionally ineligible to aspire to the presidency. In a county in which internal party votes are sometimes bought with cash (Ref B), Mejia,s patronage as President has earned him many supporters within the organization. Envious political chatter here has suggested that Vargas Maldonado, the presidential nomination front-runner, might have benefited improperly from his tenure at Public Works. (Embassy has no evidence of corruption; Vargas Maldonado oversaw the huge and ultimately successful job of preparing venues for the 2003 Pan American Games.)

(C) There are signs that the PRD will make an attempt at renewal, realizing that a strong opposition is key to Dominican democracy. The PRD is developing its first-ever party platform, to be based on a comprehensive internal examination. Some have openly criticized the long tradition of personalism and top-down decision-making, divisive rivalries within the party, clientism, and the lack of political training. While the months leading up to the January 2007 convention and a subsequent party congress will be telling, Miguel Vargas Maldonado -- with speaking engagements, sharp criticism of the ruling PLD, and campaign posters already up in the countryside -- has already launched his campaign for the presidency.

12. (U) Drafted by Peter Hensch.

13. (U) This report and extensive other material can be consulted on our SIPIRNET site,
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/wha/santodomingo/>
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